

THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

By George Barr McCutcheon

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(Continued.)

As a very small boy he had paid two visits to the home land of his father, but after the death of his parents his valuable little person was guarded so jealously by his subjects that not once had he set foot beyond the borders of Graustark, except on two widely separated occasions of great pomp and ceremony at the courts of Vienna and St. Petersburg, and a secret journey to London when he was seventeen. (It appears that he was determined to see a great football match.) On each of these occasions he was attended by a watchful member of the cabinet and certain military units in the now far from insignificant standing army. As a matter of fact, he witnessed the football match from the ordinary stands, surrounded by thousands of unsuspecting Britons, but carefully wedged in between two generals of his own army and flanked by a minister of police, a minister of the treasury and a minister of war, all of whom were excessively bored by the contest and more or less appalled by his unregal enthusiasm. He had insisted on going to the match in order to enjoy it for all it was worth to the real spectators—those who sit or stand where the compression is not unlike that applied to a box of sardines.

The regency expired when he was twenty years of age, and he became ruler in fact of himself as well as of the half million subjects who had waited patiently for the great day that was to see him crowned and glorified. He was their prince, and they loved him well.

Mr. Blithers was very close to the truth when he said to himself, if you remember that the financial situation in the far off principality was not all that could be desired. It is true that Graustark was in Russia's debt to the extent of some 20,000,000 garvos—about \$20,000,000, in other words—and that the day of reckoning was very near at hand. The loan was for a period of twelve years and had been arranged contrary to the advice of John Tullis, an American financier, who long had been interested in the welfare of the principality through friendship for the late prince consort, Lorry. He had been farsighted enough to realize that Russia would prove a hard creditor, even though she may have been since in her protestations of friendship for the modest borrower.

A stubborn element in the cabinet overcame his opposition, however, and the debt was contracted, taxation increased by popular vote and a period of governmental thriftiness inaugurated. Railroads, highways, bridges and aqueducts were built, owned and controlled by the state, and the city of Edelweiss rebuilt after the devastation created during the revolt of Count Marlinx and his minions. There seemed to be some prospect of vindication for the ministry, and Tullis, who lived in Edelweiss, was fairly minded enough to admit that their action appeared to have been for the best. The people had prospered, and taxes were paid in full and without complaint. The reserve fund grew steadily and surely, and there was every prospect that when the huge debt came due it would be paid in cash. But on the very crest of their prosperity came adversity. For two years the crops failed, and a pestilence swept through the herds. There was not so much as a penny left over for the so-called sinking fund.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Blithers Goes Visiting.

A YEAR of grace remained. The minister of finance had long since recovered from the delusion that it would be easy to borrow from either England or France to pay the Russians, there being small prospect of a renewal by the czar, even for a short period at a high rate of interest. The great nations of Europe made it plain to the little principality that they would not put a finger in Russia's pie at this stage of the game. Russia was ready to go to war with her great neighbor, Austria. Diplomacy—caution, if you will—made it imperative that other nations should sit tight and look on. It was not so to say. Not one could afford to be charged with befriending even in a roundabout way either of the angry grumblers.

It was only too well known in diplomatic circles that Russia coveted the railroads of Graustark as a means of shortening travel to a route and the most inalienable portion of Austria. If the debt were paid promptly it would be impossible, according to international law, for the great White Bear to take over these roads and at least a portion of the western border of the principality. Obviously, Austria would be benefited by the prompt lifting of the debt, but her own relations with Russia were so strained that an offer to come to the rescue of Graustark would be taken at once as an open affront and vigorously resented. Her hands were tied.

The northern and western parts of Graustark were rich with productive mines. The government had built railroads throughout these sections so that the yield of coal and copper might be given an outlet to the world at large. In making the loan Russia had demanded these prosperous sections as security for the vast sum advanced, and Graustark in an evil hour had submitted, little suspecting the trick that Dame Nature was to play in the end.

Private banking institutions in Europe refused to make loans under the rather exasperating circumstances, preferring to take no chances. Money was not cheap in these bitter days, neither in Europe nor America. Caution was the watchword. A vast European war was not improbable, despite the sincere efforts on the part of the various

nations to keep out of the controversy. Nor was Mr. Blithers far from right in his shrewd surmise that Prince Robin and his agents were not without hope in coming to America at this particular time. Graustark had laid by barely half the amount required to lift the debt to Russia. It was not beyond the bounds of reason to expect her prince to secure the remaining 15,000,000 through private sources in New York city.

Six weeks prior to his arrival in New York the young prince landed in San Francisco. He had come by way of the Orient, accompanied by the chief of staff of the Graustark army, Count Quinnox, hereditary watchdog to the royal family, and a young lieutenant of the guard, Boske Dank. Two men were they who would have given a thousand lives in the service of their prince. No less loyal was the body servant who looked after the personal wants of the eager young traveler, an Englishman of the name of Hobbs. A very poor valet was he, but an exceptionally capable person when it came to the checking of luggage and the dividing of railway timetables. He had been a guide for a tourist agency. It was quite impossible to miss a train that Hobbs suspected of being the right one.

Prince Robin came unheralded and traversed the breadth of the continent without attracting more than the attention that is bestowed upon good looking young men. Like his mother, nearly a quarter of a century before, he traveled incognito. But where she had used the somewhat emphatic name of Guggen-slocher he was known to the hotel registers as "Mr. R. Schmidt and servant."

There was romance in the eager young soul of Prince Robin. He revealed in the love story of his parents. The beautiful Princess Yeltive first saw Grenfell Lorry in an express train going eastward from Denver. Their wonderful romance was born, so to speak, in a Pullman compartment car.



"I'll marry the one I happen to want or I'll not marry at all."

and it thrived so splendidly that it almost upset a dynasty, for never—in all of nine centuries—had a ruler of Graustark stooped to marriage with a commoner.

And so which the farsighted ministry and house of nobles in Graustark set about to select a wife for their young ruler they made overtures to the Prince of Dawsbergen, whose domain adjoined Graustark on the south. The Crown Princess of Dawsbergen, then but fifteen, was the unanimous choice of the amiable matchmakers in secret conclave. This was when Robin was seventeen and just over being fatuously in love with his middle aged instructor in French.

The Prince of Dawsbergen dispatched an embassy of noblemen to assure his neighbor that the match would be highly acceptable to him and that in proper season the betrothal might be announced. But alas! both courts overlooked the fact that there was independent American blood in the two young people. Neither the Prince of Graustark nor the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen—whose mother was a Miss Beverly Calhoun of Virginia—was disposed to listen to the voice of expediency. In fact, at a safe distance of three or four hundred miles the youngsters signally turned up their noses at each other and frankly confessed that they hated each other and wouldn't be bullied into getting married, no matter what anybody said, or something of the sort.

"Spose I'm going to say I'll marry a girl I've never seen?" demanded seventeen-year-old Robin, full of wrath. "I, nor that, I'm going to look about a bit, if you don't mind. The world is full of girls. I'll marry the one I happen to want or I'll not marry at all."

"But, highness," they protested, "you must listen to reason. There must be a success in the marriage of Graustark. You would not have the name die with you. The young princess is—"

"Is fifteen, you say," he interrupted loftily. "Come around in ten years and we'll talk it over again. But I'm not going to pledge myself to marry a child in short skirts, name or no name. Is she pretty?"

The lords did not know, they had not seen the young lady.

"If she is pretty you'd be sure to know it, my lords, so we'll assume she isn't. I saw her when she was three years old, and she certainly was a fright when she cried, and, my lords, she cried all the time. No, I'll not marry her. Be good enough to say to the Prince of Dawsbergen that I'm very much obliged to him, but it's quite out of the question."

And the fifteen-year-old crown princess, 400 miles away, coolly informed her doting parents that she was tired of being a princess anywhere and very much preferred marrying some one who lived in a cottage. In fine, she stamped her little foot and said she'd jump into the river before she'd marry the Prince of Graustark.

"But he's a very handsome, adorable boy," began her mother.

"And half American, just as you are, my child," put in her father encouragingly. "Nothing could be more suitable than—"

"I don't intend to marry anybody until I'm thirty at least, so that ends it, daddy—I mean your poor old highness."

"Naturally we do not expect you to be married before you are out of short frocks, my dear," said Prince Danton stiffly. "But a betrothal is quite another thing. It is customary to arrange these marriages years before—"

"Is Prince Robin in love with me?" "Ah—ah—that's a very silly question. He hasn't seen you since you were a baby. But he will be in love with you, never fear."

"He may be in love with some one else, for all we know, so where do I come in?"

"Come in," gasped her father. "She's the mother American, dear," explained the other with her prettiest smile.

"Besides," said the crown princess, with finality, "I'm not even going to be engaged to a man I've never seen. And if you insist, I'll run away as sure as anything."

And so the matter rested. Five years have passed since the initial overtures were made by the two courts, and although several attempts were made to bring the young people to a proper understanding of their case they aroused nothing more than scornful laughter on the part of the principals.

And no one saw the portentous shadow cast by the slim daughter of William W. Blithers, for the simple reason that neither Graustark nor Dawsbergen knew that it existed. They lived in serene ignorance of the fact that God, while he was about it, put Mand Aggregate Blithers into the world on precisely the same day that the crown princess of Dawsbergen first saw the light of day.

On the twenty-second anniversary of his birth Prince Robin fared forth in quest of love and romance, not without hope of adventure, for he was a valorous chap with the heritage of warriors in his veins. Said he to himself, I dream of conquering a nation, of a long journey ahead of him. "I will traverse the great highways that my mother trod, and I will look for the Golden Girl sitting by the wayside. She must be there, and though it is a wide world, I am young and my eyes are sharp. I will find her sitting at the roadside eager for me to come, not homesick in a gloomy castle surrounded by the spoils of a hundred armies. They who live in castles wed to hate, and they who wed at the roadside live to love. Fortune attend me! If love lies at the roadside waiting do not let me pass it by. All the princesses are not inside the castles. Some sit outside the gates and laugh with glee, for love is their companion. So away I go, in looking for the princess with the happy heart and the smiling lips! It is a wide world, but my eyes are sharp. I shall find my princess."

But, alas, for his fine young dream, he found no golden girl at the roadside nor anything that suggested romance. There were happy hearts and smiling lips, and all for him, it would appear, but he passed them by, for his eyes were sharp and his wits awake. And so at last he came to Gokann, his cousin, as free as the air he breathed. He confessed that his quest had been in vain. History failed to repeat itself. His mother's romance would stand alone and shine without a flicker to the end of time. There could be no counterpart.

"Well, I had the fun of looking," he philosophized (to himself, for a man knew of his secret projects and grinned with a sort of amused tolerance for the sentimental side of his nature. "I'm a silly ass to have even dreamed of finding her as I passed along, and if I had found her what the deuce could I have done about it anyway? This isn't the day for medieval lady snatching. I dare say I'm just as well off for not having found her. I still have the zest for hunting farther, and there's a lot in that." Then aloud, "Hobbs, are we on time?"

"We are, sir," said Hobbs without even glancing at his watch. The train was passing One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street. To the minute, sir. We will be in ten minutes if nothing happens. Mr. King will be at the station to meet you, sir. Any orders, sir?"

"Yes; pinch me, Hobbs." "Pinch your highness?" in amazement. "My word, sir, not!" "I just want to be sure that the dream is over, Hobbs. Never mind. You needn't pinch me. I'm awake, and to prove it he stretched his fine young body in the ecstasy of realization.

That night he slept soundly in the Catskills. Toward the end of his first week at Red Roof, the summer home of the Truxton Kings, the prince might have been found on the broad lawn late one afternoon playing tennis with his hostess, the lovely and vivacious "Aunt Lorraine." To him Mrs. King would always be "Aunt Lorraine," even as he would never be anything but Bobby to her.

(To Be Continued.)

The air defense of England have been transferred to the War Office. They were under control of the Admiralty.

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SECTIONAL EFFECT OF RURAL ROUTE REVISION

Interesting figures on the sectional effect of the revision of rural free delivery routes by the Post Office Department have been compiled. They refute the charge that the Post Office Department has been taking away postal facilities from the North and West and using the money in Southern states. The following table shows under headings of "Southern" and "Northern" States the number of families accommodated with new or improved rural service as the result of the revision of rural routes and the introduction of automobile service to Nov. 30, 1915:

Southern.	
Alabama	325
Arkansas	251
Florida	3,028
Georgia	2,675
Mississippi	281
North Carolina	18
Oklahoma	105
South Carolina	43
Texas	189
Virginia	450
Maryland	16
	7,875

Northern.	
California	3,732
Delaware	76
Illinois	147
Indiana	596
Iowa	2,720
Kansas	323
Massachusetts	519
Michigan	2,900
Minnesota	2,495
Missouri	152
Ohio	918
Pennsylvania	3,706
Wisconsin	1,174
	19,728

The revision benefited 19,728 Northern families and only 7,875 Southern families.

Another table shows what has been done with the money saved as the result of the revision. It is used for the establishment of new routes and for extension of old ones. New routes and extensions have been established in Northern and Southern states with this money as follows:

Southern.	
Routes.	Estab-lished.
Alabama	9
Arkansas	5
Florida	15
Georgia	30
Maryland	4
Mississippi	2
Oklahoma	32
South Carolina	1
Tennessee	2
Texas	49
	148

Northern.	
Routes.	Estab-lished.
California	24
Illinois	10
Indiana	19
Iowa	188
Kansas	2
Michigan	239
Minnesota	13
Missouri	5
Ohio	44
Pennsylvania	215
West Virginia	7
	720

The money taken out of Northern states by the revision has been put back into the same Northern states in order to provide expanded and more nearly equal service throughout these states. The same has been done in the South.

Tashua and Long Hill

Miss Marian Edwards, supervisor of Trumbull schools, visited Lower Long Hill school, Wednesday and Tashua school, Thursday.

Miss Dacie and Evelyn Seeley of Tashua are spending the week in Bridgeport at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William H. Stotts. They attended the Chautauque meeting.

An epidemic of chicken pox has broken out in Long Hill. Those on the convalescent list are the children of Mr. and Mrs. Otto Walters and Mrs. Lake and son.

Mrs. Emmeline Nichols, one of the oldest residents of Tashua, died at the home of her stepdaughter, Mrs. Mary Hill, Sunday morning, Feb. 13. The funeral was held at Christ Episcopal church and largely attended, Tuesday afternoon at 2 o'clock. The flowers were beautiful. The pallbearers were William Mallett, John Treadwell, John Patterson, Arthur Jones, Franklin Mallett and Howard Peck. The burial was in Tashua cemetery.

Samuel G. Seeley, Charles B. Seeley and Miss Dacie J. Seeley of Tashua attended the funeral of their cousin, Mrs. Mary E. Seeley, at her late home, Friday afternoon.

George Hoyt has resigned his position as a carpenter in Bridgeport and has taken the Long Hill milk route of his brother, Homer Hoyt.

Mr. and Mrs. George Wolfe and daughter Mary, of New York, were Lincoln birthday and Sunday guests at the home of Mrs. Wolfe's father, Peter Gabler of Long Hill.

Miss Lena Kline of Tashua, who is a Bridgeport nurse, is ill.

Miss Dorothy Wedge of Long Hill, was given a Valentine party by her parents, Mrs. and Mrs. Nester Wedge, Monday afternoon from 4:30 to 7 o'clock.

Mr. and Mrs. Letour of West Stockbridge, Mass., have rented part of the little White Well house in Long Hill and moved there a short time ago.

Miss Ruth C. Jones of Tashua, a Bridgeport High school student, entertained a party of friends and school mates at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Jones, Saturday evening. Owing to the stormy weather only part of the invited guests were able to attend. Three tables of what were played, after which dancing was enjoyed. Guests were present from Bridgeport, Stepeny, Easton and Tashua.

Ernest Whipple of Bridgeport, son of the former Christ Episcopal church pastor, spent Sunday with Tashua friends.

Mrs. Loren R. Wildman was a recent guest of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Dickinson, of Woodbridge.

Mrs. Florence Mallett is ill.

Mrs. Matilda Gregory of Bridgeport, Mrs. Arthur Gregory of Bridgeport,

attended the funeral of Miss Marian Hurd, held at her late home, Monday afternoon.

A prayer meeting of the Easton Baptist church will be held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel G. Seeley, Friday evening. The people will come from Easton in a sleighing party.

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